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Fur Trade of the Red River Valley of the North: 1763-1812

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by

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This thesis submitted by Ronald L. Michael in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Committee under whom the work has been done.

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INTRODUCTION

Furs, or more properly skins of fur-bearing animals, are a valuable commodity. Ever since prehistoric times furs have been worn for warmth and as a sign of social status. For centuries these furs had come from Europe, but after many years of extraction their numbers had been diminished, and a new source was needed. The North American Continent became the new source. Shortly after the continent's discovery it was found that the beaver, which was highly esteemed in European society for felt hats, and other fur-bearing animals were plentiful in this new land.[1]

As the American fur trade developed, it was limited to the east coast of North America. It grew slowly and during the first half of the sixteenth century was only incidental to fishing. By the end of the century the sedentary Indians that inhabited the coastal regions had been driven out by more aggressive hunting Indians. These new Indians were well acquainted with the taking of beaver and were willing to trap and to teach the White men the skill. It was not long until the French who inhabited the area around the St. Lawrence River adapted much of the culture, language, and way of life

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[1] Unless otherwise designated the entirety of the introduction will be taken from Gordon Charles Davidson, The North West Company (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1918), pp. 1-155; Harold A. Innis, The Fur Trade in Canada (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 1-192.

of the natives. They were able to encourage the best hunters and to form alliances between tribes to secure more skins. In return the Indians were given knives, glass beads, combs, and other trinkets of lesser value which they enjoyed receiving.[2]

As the demand for trade goods increased among the Indians, a like demand for furs increased in Europe. To get more furs it was necessary to go farther into the interior where the numbers of animals had not been diminished and their presence was extensive. To accomplish this task the natives in the coastal regions were used as middlemen. They obtained the skins from tribes farther west and brought them out to French traders. As trade increased problems arose. The beaver was rapidly being extinguished, tensions increased between the middlemen, especially the Iroquois and Huron, new cultural traits were introduced among tribes, and tribal boundaries were trespassed, causing tribal wars.

The greatest problem was the increasing cost of trade. As the trading territory expanded, the cost of trade goods increased because of the greater distance they had to be transported. Indians then raised the price of beaver. The result was loss of profit. By the early 1600's, to combat this situation, the rendezvous point for the furs was moved from Three Rivers and points east inland to the Lachine Rapids (approximately seven miles up river from Montreal, Quebec). Trade goods were brought to this point by ships. This only temporarily helped trading problems.

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[2]Innis, p. 17.

In 1670 the French trading operation began to meet competition. Two explorers and traders, Pierre Esprit Radisson and M. C. des Groseillers, persuaded a group of English merchants to ask King Charles II of England for a trading charter for the Hudson Bay region. King Charles II issued the charter forming the Hudson's Bay Company and giving the company control of the Hudson Bay region for a fur trading operation.[3] This English company was formed with French technical expertness and British capital and control. Within fifteen years the company had posts established near the mouths of the Albany, Nelson, Rupert, Moose, and Severn rivers on the bay. Although the company lacked internal organization and had few trained men, it had a considerable advantage on prices since its base of operation was closer to the source of furs. The cost of the goods was therefore lower, and it could undersell the French.

For the next one hundred years the Hudson's Bay Company posts on the bay were often attacked successfully by the French only to be retaken by the British. Neither side was able to gain the upper hand. But in 1763, at the conclusion of the French and Indian wars, Great Britain had defeated the French, bringing about the collapse of the French trading operations in the New World during that century. French competition had helped the Hudson's Bay Company grow. By the

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[3]The lands given to the company were not possessed by Great Britain at that time. Not until the Peace of Utrecht in 1713 did the British obtain possession of these lands. This charter caused considerable consternation among French traders.

introduction of a number of able French traders into its operation and by learning from French trading operations, the company had grown more stable.

After the collapse of the French trading empire, some Frenchmen continued trading as independent traders but were greatly hindered. The territory obtained by the English had been divided into four sections: Quebec, extending west to Lake Nipigon and south to the forty-fifth parallel; West Florida; East Florida; and Grenada. All land not under one of these four governments, which included a large portion of the trading region, was reserved as Crown Land. To trade in any of these lands the traders had to get a license from the governor or commander in charge of the colony in which he resided.[4] This new license system lasted only a few years before it was abandoned as being impracticable, and a policy of no license was adopted. This only hurt the trade as it gave opportunity for violent and lawless conduct. A trader could trade almost anywhere, and the influence of Jesuit missionaries, which had been important during the French regime, was missing. The worst result was that the situation facilitated the use of alcohol which the Jesuit missionaries had attempted to eliminate.

Since the license system was abandoned, one trader had as much right as the next to trade at any location and even at the came location as another. With such competition

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[4]This actually was only a continuation of the old French policy which required a license limiting the places the traders could trade and restraining their use of liquor.

individuals and companies resorted to every means to secure furs themselves in preference to the competitor. Liquor was used to bribe the Indians, resulting in goods being bartered below cost. Little or no money was made by this procedure. In 1779 nine Montreal traders banded together for one year, rendering the property of each as common property. This eliminated much of the competition and allowed traders to remain in the interior since only a few were needed to bring the furs out each season. The agreement stated that "the North West was divided into sixteen shares all which form one company."[5] This was the beginning of the great North West Company.

Although after a single one-year renewal the agreement was abandoned for a few years, in 1783-84 it was renewed with Benjamin and Joseph Frobisher and Simon McTavish as the principal partners. The company was purely a partnership with transferable shares, not incorporated and not of limited liability. Merchants from Montreal were included in the partnership and were responsible for getting the trade goods each year. They invested no capital of their own but ordered the goods from Europe on credit. It was four years after the goods were sent out on credit until they were paid for. The first year the order went to Montreal via the yearly ship. The second the goods were taken to the posts. The third the furs obtained by trading the goods were taken back to Montreal. The fourth they were

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[5]Davidson, p. 9n.

taken to Europe to be sold and to pay the creditor.

As the company prospered and grew, it was divided into departments including the Lower Red River of which the Red River was a part.[6] By the time the North West Company had been established, the western terminus of the trade was so far from Montreal that the voyageurs were not able to make the trip in both directions in a single summer.[7] To remedy this Grand Portage (now Grand Portage, Minnesota) was established about 1787 as a rendezvous.[8] Thereafter the trade goods left the Lachine Rapids every spring about the first of May, weather permitting. The goods were transported this distance in a Montreal canoe. At Grand Portage they were met by brigades of North canoes containing the season's return of skins.[9]

During the years that the North West Company was developing, the Hudson's Bay Company expanded. As they expanded into the interior of the Northwest, they found it

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[6]Louis Francis Rodrique Masson, (ed.), Les Bourgeois de la Compagine du Nord-Ouest: Recite de Voyages Lettres et Rapports Inedits Relaif au Nord-Ouest Canadian (2 vols., New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960), I, 396-413. The departments varied somewhat but were divided up primarily in the following departments: Athabaska, English River, Upper Red River, Lower Red River, Fort Dauphin, Rat River, Nipigon, Red Lake, Fond du Lac, Flambeau, Rainy Lake, and Kaministiquia.

[7]The name voyageurs applied to the canoe men in the Northwest.

[8]In 1803 the rendezvous was switched to Fort Kaministiquia (Fort William, Ontario) when United States customs collectors wanted payment for crossing part of the United States of which they claimed Grand Portage to be a part. Rather than argue, the company moved its operations.

[9]The Montreal canoe was a forty-five foot, ten-to twelve-man canoe which when fully loaded, weighed about 6,000

necessary to use a greater number of boats.[10] Before this most of its trade had been done within a few days' travel from its bay posts. Alexander Henry the Younger, (nephew of the famous Alexander Henry), bourgeois in charge of the Red River from 1800-08, said that the boats the Hudson's Bay Company used were manned by four oarsman and a steersman and held approximately 3,600 pounds.[11] In addition to boats the Hudson's Bay Company also used birch bark canoes like those of the North West Company.

While the companies expanded competition grew, but they remained fairly stable until 1795. At that time dissension among the North West Company partners resulted in the withdrawal of several men who joined the Forsyth Richardson

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pounds. The North canoe was a twenty-five foot, six-to eight-man canoe which weighed about 2,500 pounds when fully loaded. Both types had the voyageurs divided up as follows: one bowsman who was responsible for the course of the canoe while in progress, especially through rapids and across portages; one steersman, about equal in stature whose job it was to steer the canoe; and the remainder who were called middlemen or paddlers.

The Montreal canoes were never taken inland from Grand Portage since they were too large to navigate the rivers and numerous portages. Likewise, the North canoes were seldom taken into Lake Superior since they were too small for navigation on large bodies of water because of the frequent high winds.

[10]Innis, p. 160. To man these boats which were known as York boats, they brought men from the Orkney Islands which are off the north coast of the British Isles. These men, and the Hudson's Bay Company men in general, became known as Orkneymen.

[11]Alexander Henry, New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry and of David Thompson, ed. Elliot Coues (3 vols., New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), I, 46.

Company.[12] The majority stayed with the parent company, but at least one other, Alexander Mackenzie, wished to withdraw. He still had two years remaining on an agreement with the North West Company. In 1799 his engagement was up, and he notified the company that he was leaving its employ. Then Mackenzie traveled to England where he was knighted for his publication of the account of his exploration which had taken him to the Artic Ocean.[13]

While in London he approached the British government with a scheme for combining the fur trade and the fishing industry.[14] He found little interest in his scheme and shortly gave up in disgust and returned to the Northwest and placed himself at the head of the New North West Company. This company was later referred to as Sir Alexander Mackenzie and Company or more commonly as the X. Y. Company.[15] The intense rivalry that followed between the North West Company and the X. Y. Company was not concluded until the summer of 1804 when Simon McTavish died, removing the greatest opponent of conciliation. Successful overtures were then made to Mackenzie to come back into the company.[16]

Once again united, the North West Company was able to compete quite successfully with the Hudson's Bay Company until Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk, began his settlement at present Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1811. Selkirk had read Mackenzie's account of exploration and had written the Secretary of the

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[12]Davidson, p. 73. [13]Ibid., p. 75. [14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid., p. 76. [16]Ibid., p. 80.

Home Department recommending that the Red River country be used as a colony for emigrants from Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland.[17] He was referred to the Colonial Department which refused to take up the matter. He then took it upon himself to organize a body of some eight hundred settlers, but the government made him take them to Prince Edward Island where they founded a successful settlement.[18] Selkirk then worked out a new scheme. He found that he could secure land from the Hudson's Bay Company to establish an agricultural colony. The plan Selkirk followed was to gain control of the company's stock which would allow him to purchase the land he desired.[19]

The North West Company, upon learning of this scheme, was alarmed. If successful it would have eliminated its base of supplies at the mouth of the Winnipeg River which was used to provision its traders heading for Lake Athabaska. It also would have seriously injured its ability to compete in lands toward the Rocky Mountains. The company contended, with little success, that the Hudson's Bay Company charter was an illegal royal monopoly and that legally the charter gave no territory or exclusive trading privileges such a distance from the Hudson Bay. The company's efforts were to little avail, for at the Hudson's Bay Company's annual meeting on May 30, 1811, Selkirk's proposal to purchase land was voted upon and passed.[20] The purchased land covered approximately 110,000 square miles,

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[17] Ibid., p. 118. [18] Ibid. [19] Ibid., p. 144.

[20] Ibid., p. 145.

part of which was within the United States.

In 1812 the first settlers, about seventy in number, arrived and spent the winter at Fort Daer, near present Pembina, North Dakota.[21] The conflict that ensued was bitter and determined. Each company made seizures of the other's posts, but particularly damaging were the Hudson's Bay Company seizures of North West Company provisions being stored at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. These provisions were used by the North West Company in its trading farther to the northwest. Until 1821, when the two companies amalgamated, it was a battle or attrition which the Hudson's Bay Company finally won.

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[21] Ibid., p. 146.

CHAPTER I

TRADING POSTS, 1763-1811

Trade developed slowly along the Red River of the North. From 1763 to 1790 traders made infrequent visits to the river. The area was not known to be abundant in furs and it was off the main transportation route from Grand Portage to Lake Athabaska (western terminus of the fur trade). The first post on the Red River was built in the winter of 1770-71. It was located about nine miles above the mouth of Netley Creek (about sixty miles north of Winnipeg, Manitoba). The small post or wintering quarters was erected by Joseph Frobisher, a trader from Montreal who later became associated with the North West Company.[1] Although no description remains of that fort, it is relatively certain that a structure was built. Voyageurs referred to the location as "Mr. Joseph Frobisher's Fort."[2]

A post was built ten years later at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, better known then as the Forks. The trader and partner in the North West Company, John McDonnell, who served on the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle rivers from 1793 to 1795 said that "in the year 1780 or 1781,

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[1] Henry, I, 43n. See Appendix A for related maps.

[2] Charles M. Gates (ed.), Five Fur Traders of the Northwest: Peter Pond, John McDonnell, Archibald N. McLeod, Hugh Faries, and Thomas Conner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1933), p. 109.

the Indians made an attempt to pillage the traders, Messrs. Bruce and Boyer, ... Owing to this affair, the traders, were obliged, . . . , to re-embark their canoes and return to winter at the Forks."[3] The traders had been at Poplar Fort on the Assiniboine where they had hoped to cut off all White men from the interior. In 1806 Henry collaborated the story.[4] This is the first known post at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers after 1763. Whether it was a North West Company establishment in unknown, but in 1787 Boyer was employed by the North West Company and sent to construct a post on the Peace River.[5]

About 1780 the first Hudson's Bay Company post, Fort Douglas, was built on the Red River. Little information is available concerning the location and validity of the post, but it was included on a map drawn in January 1796.[6] The map shows a post across the Red River from present St. Boniface, Manitoba. After the arrival of settlers of the Selkirk Colony in 1812, the post was used as headquarters for the Hudson's Bay Company and the Red River settlement.[7]

In 1789 a post on the Rat River (about forty miles south of Winnipeg, Manitoba) was built but its exact location is unknown. William McGillivray, who wintered there,

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[3]Masson, I, 270. [4]Henry, I, 293.

[5]Ibid., p. 293n.

[6]Charles Napier Bell, The Old Forts of Winnipeg (1738-1927) (Winnipeg: Dawson Richardson Publications, 1927), p. 24.

[7]Ibid.

opposed the Hudson's Bay Company.[8] It is probable that this post was at or near the confluence of the Rat and Red rivers. Seldom did a trader build far upstream along the Red's tributaries. Along the main artery of transportation competitors could be watched easily and Indians could be contacted with limited effort. The former practice was especially noticeable at the Pembina posts, the Park River posts, and at the posts located at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.

In 1792 a trader by the name of Joseph Reaumes, an independent trader, wintered on the Red River approximately forty-two miles south of the Marais River (about twenty miles north of Pembina). He may have been in the Bois Percé area or near the mouth of the present Two Rivers.[9]

David Grant of the North West Company was the next trader to erect a post. The post, according to Henry, was built on the south side of the Pembina River and on the east side of the Red River. (This is approximately the location of St. Vincent, Minnesota).[10] David Thompson, an explorer and surveyor for the North West Company, wrote that a post was located about ten and one half miles south of the Pembina River and on the west side of the Red River.[11] No description

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[8]Masson, II, 244. "Opposed," a common term in the trade, meant being in competition with another company.

[9]Milo M. Quaife (ed.), "Extracts from Capt. McKay's Journal," Wisconsin Historical Collections (Madison, 1916), LXIII, 209.

[10]Henry, I, 80.

[11]J. B. Tyrrell (ed.), David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), p. 251.

accompanied either account so whether they were the same post is unknown. Henry dated the post he mentioned as being built in the early 1790's, so it can be assumed that the post mentioned by Thompson was built about the same time. It is entirely possible that Grant wintered at one post one year and at the other the preceding or following year. It seemed to be the habit of the North West Company to change the location of its posts frequently. Another possibility is that they were the same post and that one of the accounts was in error.

In the latter part of the 1790's Charles Chaboillez, a partner in the North West Company in charge of trade on the Red River, built a post one-sixth of a mile up the Rat River.[12] (This was a few miles west of Niverville, Manitoba). He spent the winter of 1796-97 there and the following winter moved south to build Fort Paubna on the south side of the Pembina River near its mouth and on the west side of the Red River. The post on the Pembina consisted of three buildings: a large shop and house combination and two smaller houses. Chaboillez wrote that the large house was seventy feet long and about thirty feet wide. Eight of his men lived in the large house with the remainder living in the small houses. Chaboillez stayed at this post only one season, 1797-98.[13]

In the fall of 1797 an Indian informed Chaboillez that the Hudson's Bay Company had already gone up to the Pembina River to winter. When he arrived they had already begun to build about one half mile below the confluence of the

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[12]Thompson, p. LXXV. [13]Henry, I, 80.

rivers. In charge of the post was a Mr. Richards.[14] In November Richards defected and Thomas Miller was sent to replace him. Richards then worked for Chaboillez the remainder of the winter.[15]

Competition again existed on the Red River in 1797. The competition was "South Traders" named Vincent Roy and Desjardon who had arrived at the Forest River and had begun to build.[16] "South Traders" were evidently back in 1798 because a trader recorded that "Roy had orders to go to Riviere au pemina, ..."[17] This was one of the rare occasions when they built on the Red and did not continue farther north. The location of this post was thirty-five miles south of the Pembina River or five and one half miles south of the Forest River and on the west side of the Red River.

In 1798 Thompson sighted a fort near Pembina but gave no information concerning it. Since it was known that Roy was ordered to go to the river again in 1798, it might have

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[14]Harold Hickerson, "Charles Jean Baptiste Chaboillez Journal, 1797-1798," Ethnohistory, VI (Summer and Fall, 1959), 279.

[15]Ibid., p. 284.

[16]Ibid., pp. 284-85. The term "South Traders" or "South Men" was a term for traders from Michilimackinac who entered the Mississippi Valley from Lake Superior at Fond du Lac and reached the Red River from the south.

[17]Jean Baptiste Perrault, "Narrative of the Travels and Adventures of a Merchant Voyageur in the Savage Territories of Northern America Leaving Montreal the 28th of May 1783 (to 1820)," ed. John Sharpless Fox, Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections, XXXVII (Lansing, 1909-1910), 574.

been his post. Its location was eleven miles north of Pembina.[18]

In 1800 the North West Company began full scale operations on the Red River. That summer at Grand Portage Alexander Henry was given charge of the trade on the Red River, in the Pembina Mountains, and at the post at Portage la Prairie on the Assiniboine River. In September 1800 Henry started up the Red River guided by a party of Ojibwa hunters. Henry wanted to go up the river, possibly as far as present-day Grand Forks, North Dakota, and select a building site. The area that far south had not been trapped and it is reasonable to assume that the furs would have been plentiful. However, the Ojibwa did not want to go any farther than the Pembina River, fearing their enemy, the Sioux, who lurked everywhere south of the Pembina River.[19] The Indians finally conceded to go as far as the Park River but told Henry that if he went any farther he would go without their services.[20]

After arriving at Park River Henry found the area had a grave liability. He said that "being very thirsty we attempted to drink at the river, but found the river a perfect brine on which I saw it would be impossible to build."[21] Evidently he decided the salt concentration was not too strong or he feared the Indian's desertion because the next day he began searching for another place to build. He decided on a location on the west side of the Red River one

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[18]Thompson, p. 249. [19]Henry, I, 86.

[20]Ibid. [21]Ibid., p. 90.

quarter mile up the Park River "with a beautiful level plain intervening" between the site and the Red River.[22] He would have preferred to build at the mouth of the rivers but no wood was available on one side of the Park and the land was too low on the other. He also examined the east side of the Red but found it too low and subject to flooding in the spring.[23]

The first structure was an oak and pine storehouse 24' x 24' x 9'. The stockade, which was finished next, used 564 pickets 15 feet in length. Assuming these pickets were embedded three feet in the ground, the stockade was twelve feet high. If the pickets were eight to twelve inches in diameter, the stockade would have been between ninety-four feet and one hundred and forty-one feet per side. The stockade had two gates approximately eight feet high and one watch tower.[24] As time permitted a dwelling house, a storehouse, and a shop were built. Henry mentioned only one problem during the construction, that of the building of chimneys. Since no stone was available Henry's men used poor quality clay, actually a coarse black mud, which, having little consistency, cracked and fell apart while drying.[25]

The only detail left before winter was the felling of wood for the four fireplaces. Henry had his men cut 15,360 cubic feet of oak. That was a sufficient supply since they were leaving early in the spring. The Park River post of the North West Company was then prepared for winter. The post was

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[22] Ibid., p. 91. [23] Ibid., [24] Ibid., p. 123.

[25] Ibid., p. 104.

used as a main post one winter. In 1800-01 Henry also established an outpost or subsidary post on the Roseau River.[26]

The next fall (1801) Henry was back but he went up the Red only as far as the Pembina River. The Ojibwa found the Pembina a more agreeable point since it was not into the Sioux country. In the spring of 1801 Henry had left Michael Langlois, one of his voyageurs, behind to build a post on the Pembina River. The post was partially erected when Henry returned. The original size and number of buildings were probably about the same as at the Park River although no comparison was given. This fort eventually had a stable for work horses, an oak storehouse 100 feet long by 20 feet wide, dwelling houses, a shop, and block houses.[27]

The North West Company had competition that winter from Thomas Miller and eight Orkneymen of the Hudson's Bay Company. They built just below Henry on the east side of the Red River. About one month later the Hudson's Bay Company decided to change its location, probably to be closer to the North West Company.[28] That was the first real effort of the Hudson's Bay Company to compete with the North West Company. In 1780, 1789, and 1797 it had built on the river but was not close enough to the North West Company for competition to exist.

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[26] Ibid., p. 123.

[27] Ibid., pp. 191, 195, 210, 424, 212.

[28] Ibid., p. 190.

No mention was made after the 1801-02 winter of the Hudson's Bay Company's presence until 1805 when Henry observed Thomas Miller and two boats bound for the Pembina River. Henry arrived at Pembina about one month later and found the Hudson's Bay Company already building.[29] Again a year intervened before it had another post on the river. In 1807 Henry wrote that "two Hudson's Bay Company boats arrived from Albany Factory; Hugh Henry (Heney), master."[30]

The only other competitor to establish a post on the Pembina River was the X. Y. Company. Although material is practically void on its activities, it probably had a post at Pembina from 1800 until its fusion with the North West Company in 1804. No mention of a post was made until 1801, and that was an outpost, but in 1800 John McDonald of Garth, a bourgeois for the North West Company, wrote that six canoes of the X. Y. Company had gone via the Pembina to the Athabaska country. This arouses curiosity as the Pembina River was out of the way in going from Grand Portage to the Athabaska country. Quite possibly provisions and trade goods were picked up or dropped off at a post on the Pembina River.[31]

Two other main posts of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company deserve mention, those located at the mouth of the Winnipeg River. Little or no trading was done at these posts. They were important as provision supply depots. The provisions were used every spring by the voyageurs and

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[29] Ibid., p. 265. [30] Ibid., p. 424.

[31] Davidson, p. 89.

Orkneymen passing through. Both Henry and Daniel Harmon, a clerk and later partner in the North West Company, mentioned the posts' esistence by 1800.[32]

The remaining posts were outposts of the main ones at the Park or Pembina rivers. Of the outposts, the ones in the Pembina Mountains were most important. The first was built by the North West Company in the fall of 1800. In October Henry visited his traders and found them operating out of a fifteen-foot-square hut which served as a dwelling, storehouse, and shop.[33] The next winter Henry built nine miles higher up into the mountains "at the foot of the steep sandy banks where the river [Pembina] issues from the mountains."[34] That season they took with them five small horse-drawn carts. This was the first mention of the use of carts on the Red River for which the Red River trade after the Selkirk settlement became famous. In 1802 seven voyageurs went into the mountains and built on the Pinancewaywining River.[35] The same procedure was carried on from 1800 to 1804 and again in 1807 to reach and obtain furs from the Cree, Sonnant, and Stone or Assiniboine tribes who did not usually come all the way to the Red River to trade.

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[32]Henry, I, 35.

[33]Ibid., p. 118. This post was built by voyageurs Lagasse and Dubois.

[34]Ibid., p. 186.

[35]Ibid., p. 204. The exact location of the Pinancewaywining River is unkown. It is assumed that it issues from the Pembina Mountains.

The North West Company outposts at Grand Forks (present Grand Forks, North Dakota) were next in importance. In 1800 Henry made a scouting trip to Grand Forks but no post was established until the following fall.[36] By spring that post was second only to Pembina in the number of beaver pelts secured.[37] Four seasons lapsed until the North West Company built at Grand Forks again. This was the only outpost that Henry established in 1805, probably due to the decline of fur-bearing animals.[38] A year lapsed again before another post was built there. In 1807 both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company built posts.[39] Most of the pelts that came from the Grand Forks posts came from east of the Red River toward the Red Lake region.

The remaining posts were of less importance and a discussion of each follows in chronological order. In 1801 both the X. Y. Company and the North West Company built at the Scratching River (about fifty-five miles north of Pembina, North Dakota).[40] This reference was the first men-

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[36] Ibid., p. 186. In the fall of 1801 Henry sent John Cameron and several voyageurs along with 2,250 pounds of trade goods to build. This area was called Grand Forks because of a fork in the Red River. Today the fork is known as the Red Lake River. Its source is the Red Lake in Minnesota.

[37] Ibid., p. 198.

[38] Ibid., p. 267. Eleven voyageurs including Crebassa, Cadotte, and LeSueur operated this post.

[39] Ibid., p. 424. That year William Henry, T. Veandrie, and seven other voyageurs operated the post.

[40] Ibid., p. 63n. J. Duford, J. Crebassa, and fifteen voyageurs built this post for the X. Y. Company.

tion of the X. Y. Company building a post on the Red River. The Turtle River post was the next erected. In September 1802 Henry built at the confluence of the Red and Turtle rivers.[41] That post lasted only one season. The following fall, 1803, Henry began building at the confluence of the Red and the Snake rivers (about ten miles south of Drayton, North Dakota). Whether that post was completed is conjecture as no returns are accounted for at that post.[42]

That same year, 1803, the North West Company also built an outpost at the forks of the Assiniboine and Red rivers. The post was sometimes referred to as Alexander Henry's "The Fork's Fort." Henry also established a post at Netley Creek in 1803. Although little is said about these outposts, their validity is established from returns that were obtained from them in 1804. The next season, 1804-05, the Netley Creek post was again operated. That year the Forest River post was also reactivated by the North West Company.[43]

In 1806 Henry built his only Red River outpost at the Sandhill River.[44] The following year, 1807, only one post, Fort Gibraltar, was built. John McDonald built this post at

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[41] Ibid., p. 204. This post was erected by Cameron and eight voyageurs.

[42] Ibid., p. 229. Cameron built this post.

[43] Ibid., pp. 245, 259. Dorion was in charge of the "Forks" post in 1803 and T. Vaudry was in charge of the Netley Creek post. The next season Dorion was at Netley Creek and C. Hesse and J. Duford were at the Forest River.

[44] Ibid., p. 422. William Henry and Michael Langlois were the traders at this post.

the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. Henry mentioned its presence but did not indicate who had charge of the post. Since it was located at the Forks it might have been charged to the Upper Red River Department which consisted mainly of the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle rivers.[45] The post, following the establishment of the Selkirk Colony, became headquarters for the North West Company in its fight for survival. After 1808 a Mr. Wells had charge of the post.[46] During the same period the Hudson's Bay Company had no posts in the vicinity which indicates the slackening of competition before the Selkirk Settlement.[47]

From 1763 to 1796 there was seldom more than a single post operating each season on the Red River. In years following conditions changed. It became unusual if there were not several posts operating each season. These posts were operated either by independent traders or men assigned to the territory by one of the trading companies. For independent traders or a small company post, a single trader or a trader and several voyageurs would operate a post. In contrast a large company post with outposts might have required nearly 75 voyageurs, a company partner, a clerk, and an interpreter to carry on its trading operations.

Treatment of the traders on the Red River falls into

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[45] Masson, II, 36.

[46] Edwin James (ed.), A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1830), p. 172.

[47] Ibid.

five categories: North West Company traders, Hudson's Bay Company traders, X. Y. Company traders, "South Traders", and independent traders.

The first traders of the North West Company were Boyer and Bruce. They wintered at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in 1780 or 1781. Although there is some doubt whether they were connected with the North West Company, they will be credited with being its first traders. David Grant followed in the 1790's as the second trader and first to erect a post near the Pembina River. These men carried on as one or two men posts, having no other known voyageurs accompany them.

It was not until the winter of 1796-97 that the North West Company attempted trading on a larger scale. That year Charles Jean Baptist Chaboillez built a post on the Rat River. He left no journal for that winter, but it is likely that he was accompanied by voyageurs because the following fall he returned to the Rat River with sixteen voyageurs.[48]

Chaboillez was followed in 1800 by Alexander Henry who also was accompanied by a number of voyageurs. From 1800 to 1808 Henry was the chief North West Company trader on the

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[48]Hickerson, p. 288. Chaboillez was born in Trois Rivers, Canada, in 1742. He eventually worked his way up to a minor partnership in the North West Company. His voyageurs for the winter of 1797-98 included: LeDuc, Sauve, Bertrand, Callough, Chevalier, Chaurette, Allard, Bibeau, Bourret, Delorme, Pouilliot, Richards, Lambert, Miniclier, Dubois, Desjardiax, and Antoil Bercier. Many of these voyageurs were probably the same for the preceding year. It was usual for voyageurs to return to the same department and post several years in succession.

Red River. During the eight winters he spent on the river he kept a copious journal. Although he did not indicate how many voyageurs were with him each year he did include a complete list or a partial list several times. In 1800-01 he had twenty-one voyageurs, in 1805 seventy-five, and in 1808 twenty-four.[49]

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[49]Henry, I, 49-52, 282, 441-43. The following is a list of Henry's voyageurs in 1800-01.

Alexander Henry-bourgeois in charge
Jacques Barbe-voyageur (bowsman)
Etienne Charbonneau-voyageur (helmsman and guide)
Joseph Dubois-voyageur (helmsman)
Angus McDonald-voyageur (middleman)
Antoine Lafrance-voyageur (middleman)
Pierre Bonza or Bonga-Negro (servant)
Michel (Coloret) Langlois-clerk
Andre Lagasse- voyageur (conductor)
Joachim Daisville or Donville-voyageur (steerer)
Andre Beauchemin-voyageur (middleman)
Jean Baptiste Desmarais-interpreter
Jean Baptiste Benoit-voyageur (middleman)
Jean Baptiste Laroque, Sr.-voyageur (conductor)
Jean Baptiste Laroque, Jr.-voyageur (steerer)
Etienne Roy-voyageur (middleman)
Francois Roger, Sr.-voyageur (middleman)
Joseph Masson-voyageur (conductor)
Charles Bellegarde-voyageur (steerer)
Joseph Hamel-voyageur (middleman)
Nicolas Pouliot- voyageur (middleman)

These were Henry's voyageurs in 1808.

Angus McDonald	Joseph Bourree
Charles Larocque	Angus Brisebois
Pierre Martin	Jean Baptiste Larocque
Jean Baptiste Lambert	Jean Baptiste Desmarais
Joseph Lambert	Louis Desmarais
Pierre Vandle	Joseph Plante
Antoine LePointe	Cyrile Paradis
Houle	Michel Damphousse
(Etinne) Charboneau	Charles Bottineau
Fleury	Jervis (Gervais) Assiniboines
Suprennant	Antoine Larocque
Andre Beauchemin	Bohomme Montour

After Henry's departure in 1808 little is known about the Red River trade. John Tanner said that after Henry left a Mr. McKenzie came but he "remained but a short time, and after him came a Mr. Wells."[50] Wells lasted three or four seasons which means he was in the vicinity from either 1808 or 1809 until about 1812. No other source mentioned Wells or a McKenzie close to the Red River, unless it could mean Roderic McKenzie who was with the North West Company at that time.

The list of North West Company traders is far from complete, but it is considerably more accurate than the Hudson's Bay Company list which is almost a complete void. The first mention of a Hudson's Bay Company trader by name is in 1797 when a Mr. Richards, possibly John Richards, opposed Chaboillez at Pembina. Richards defected in October and spent the rest of that winter as a trader with Chaboillez. He was replaced by Thomas Miller.

Not until 1801 is another name connected with the Hudson's Bay Company. That year Thomas Miller and Thomas Mitchell opposed Henry. Again in 1805 Miller's name is mentioned but during the intervening years no record of traders is available. The next reference was in 1807 when Hugh Henry was the company trader at Grand Forks. The last reference was from 1809 to 1811 when a Mr. Hanie was located

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[50]James, p. 172. Since Tanner's narrative is a recollection in his old age, its validity is sometimes questionable. Tanner, a White man, was still a child when the Ottawa and Ojibwa Indians captured him and then raised him. After he was grown and had a family, he returned to his White civilization.

at Pembina.[51]

The last major company having traders in the area was the X. Y. Company. Like the Hudson's Bay Company the names of its traders are generally lacking. The void in this case is partially because the company's existence ended in 1804. After that time Henry probably had a number of previous X. Y. Company voyageurs working under him. The only year when a separate mention of X. Y. Company traders was made was in 1801. That year J. Duford and J. Crebassa were mentioned as building on the Marais River and Mr. Cournoyer building in the Pembina Mountains.

Another group, the "South Traders", although smaller than any of the companies, had the second largest number of traders mentioned by name. Vincent Roy was their chief trader in the area. Accompanying him in the winter of 1797-98 were the traders Desjardon, LaVerite, Cotté, and Allard. Roy was ordered back the following year so presumably he was again present during the 1798-99 season.

The last group, the independents or "freemen", again had few names connected with it. In 1770 Joseph Frobisher was the first known independent on the Red River. He was followed in 1789 by Joseph Reaumes. From 1792 until after the fusion of the X. Y. Company with the North West Company in 1804 no independents appeared. After the coalition many of the old X. Y. Company employees remained in the Northwest trading as independents and not joining either

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[51] Ibid., p. 173.

of the major companies. They were known as "freemen". Not until 1807 did they become bothersome on the Red River. That season Henry wrote that they "were troubled by an augumentation of freemen from Canada, etc. Their total numbers on this river amounted to 45; more worthless fellows, could not be found in the North West."[52] They were not entirely without value as they "brought via carts loads of grease" to Henry's Pembina post.[53] The grease was used in the preparation of pemmican.

In all probability the North West Company had the greatest number of traders on the Red River during this period. Although evidence is lacking, the Hudson's Bay Company probably was second, the X. Y. Company third, the independents fourth, and the "South Traders" were last in numbers of traders present. No matter who the traders worked for, they were hard seasoned men leading a difficult way of life.

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[52]Henry, I, 424. [53]Ibid., p. 434.

CHAPTER II

HUNTING AND TRADING

No matter where the posts were built or to whom they belonged, the trading goal was the same--they were all in the market for furs. The furs of the beaver, otter, marten, fisher, mink, muskrat, badger, wolverine, fox, wolf, lynx, moose, elk, and bear were all saleable in Europe. To secure the desired furs the services of the Indian tribes in the immediate area were engaged. In return for furs, the Indians were given trade goods which made life easier for them. They used guns, axes, and iron ice chisels to help in securing furs; cloth and beads for making clothing; and nesting kettles to help in cooking.

Of all the tribes trading on the Red River, the Ojibwa showed the most interest in hunting and trading.[1] (The Ojibwa lived mainly south and east of the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers). Their interest in trading was great enough that when they came to trade and found the trader away, they would await his return. In 1802 Henry arrived at his Pembina post and found sixty Ojibwa waiting for him.[2] A similar event occured at one of the North West Company outposts

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[1] See Appendix B for a list of the various trade goods.

[2] Henry, I, 203.

in the Pembina Mountains.[3]

The Ojibwa were the most reliable traders in the area but were not without undesirable characteristics. It was said that they showed no gratitude. A trader could treat them well and satisfy all their demands for a long time, and then refuse them but a glass of liquor and all past obligations were forgotten. They would then become the trader's greatest enemy.[4] They were also considered lazy, superstitious, and religious. Many times they would join the Assiniboine Indians in the Hair Hills and remain in "idleness, singing, dancing, smoking, and trading medicine for horses" for days.[5] Henry even feared their presence. In 1803 he built blockhouses under the pretence of defense from the Sioux but really fearing the Ojibwa.[6]

The trading tribes of next importance were the Cree and the Assiniboine. The Cree were mainly from north and northeast of the Red River and the Assiniboine mainly from north and northwest of it. Early in the trading days these tribes were suspicious of the Ojibwa and Henry observed, "always on their guard with guns, bows, and arrows in their hand."[7] As the trade continued, they apparently became reconciled to one another since numerous mentions were made

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[3] Ibid., pp. 132, 196. No complete account of Ojibwa chiefs is available but the following were known to have been included: Little Shell, Buffalo, Nanaudeyea, Chamanou, Terre Grasse, Maymuitch, and Tabashaw.

[4] Ibid., p. 125. [5] Ibid., p. 191. [6] Ibid., p. 210.

[7] Ibid., p. 196.

that they were hunting and camping together. Little was said of the character of these tribes except that they were lazy, indolent, and perfidious.[8]

The only other trading tribes mentioned by any traders were the Snake, Gros Ventre, and the Sonnant. The Snakes were referred to as mischievious, thieving scoundrels.[9]

As a general policy in regards to the trading Indians Henry felt that:

> no white man [should] be so vain as to believe that an Indian really esteems him or suppose him to be his equal. No--they despise us in their hearts, and all their outward profession of respect and friendship proceed merely from the necessity under which they labor of having intercourse with us to procure their necessities.[10]

One non-trading nation also merits mention, the Sioux which was considered the warring nation. The Sioux were located primarily south and west of the Red River. According to a trader, they were "the most savage and barbarous nation of the Plain Indians."[11] They often ventured into the Red River country, and the trading nations were constantly watching for them. Only twice after the trade was firmly established on the river did they cause extensive trouble. In 1797 they massacred a large camp of Assiniboine, Cree, and Ojibwa near the mouth of the Red River.[12] In 1808 they attacked Henry's Pembina fort with approximately one hundred warriors but were repelled.[13]

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[8] Masson, I, 281.
[9] Henry, I, 46.
[10] Ibid., p. 264.
[11] Masson, I, 269.
[12] Ibid., p. 208.
[13] Henry, I, 432-36.

Although practically no trader had anything good to say about any of the Indians, they were kept hunting and trapping a good portion of the time. Even when talk of war began, a gallon or keg of rum would quiet them. This still did not guarantee that they would obtain furs. Hunting and killing fur-bearing animals, particularly beaver, were difficult tasks. David Thompson said that "the beaver hunter is often at a loss what to do, and sometimes passes a whole day without coming to a determination."[14]

The beaver's home is durable and there is no way of knowing if the beaver is there. Even if he is home there is much difficulty getting him out to kill him. Various methods were adopted to capture and kill the beaver which overcame these handicaps. One method was to stake off the entrance to the beaver's home while he was out or to stake the entrance shut when it was known that the beaver was inside. If the beaver was staked out of his house, it was a relatively simple matter to spear him when he attempted to return. It was another matter when he was caged inside his home. When this happened the Indians used a small dog with a keen sense of smell. The dog would scratch on the weakest spot of the beaver's home, the spot at which the beaver's scent was the strongest. The Indians would then take an ax and ice chisel and cut a hole in the place where the dog had scratched. After the hole was through the house they used a crooked stick to determine to which side of the house the beaver had

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[14]Thompson, p. 201.

fled. Another hole was made at this point and the beaver was killed with a chisel.[15]

The Ojibwa had several additional methods for killing beaver. In the fall steel traps were set on the path which the animals traveled while building their homes and gathering food for the winter. If steel traps were not available, the simplest method was to destroy the beaver homes and drain the ponds on which the beaver had built. The beaver would become frightened when deprived of water and would try to flee. This was a long tedious procedure and several days often passed without killing a single beaver. But the Indians were not easily discouraged.

Possibly the easiest time of the year to kill beaver was in the spring. At this time the beavers came out in search of fresh food and made easy prey. The Indians were able to slip silently through the rivers and kill the beaver from about thirty feet with either guns or bows and arrows. Another method was to cut a hole three to four feet in diameter through the remaining ice. Long stakes were arranged around the edge of the hole to form a circular enclosure at the bottom. A board was placed to fall over the entrance of the enclosure as soon as a beaver was inside. All that was left to do was to fish the beaver out with a spear. This method was especially good in the spring as small green willow and poplar branches were placed in the middle of the enclosure as bait. When the beaver came looking for fresh food he was

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[15] Ibid.

trapped.[16]

Buffalo were probably the second most numerous animals taken.[17] This may not be borne out by statistics because many of them were used for food and no record of their killing was kept. The hide, or robe as it was called, was the part traded. Since the buffalo robe was coarse and shaggy, the robes were not sent to Europe but were kept as blankets for the men. Unlike the beaver the buffalo took no unique procedure to kill. Most of the kills were by gun or bow and arrow in the open prairies. Many times the Indian, dressed in a buffalo robe, would stalk the buffalo, but at other times the Indians would pursue the animals on horseback and kill them. Where possible they were driven over a fault or cliff and shot upon falling to the ground. Since they were relatively large and roamed the prairie, they were easy prey.[18]

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[16]Masson, II, 342-44.

[17]Henry, I, 446. The buffalo was a large animal. In the fall a fat cow weighed from 600-700 pounds and a lean cow about 300 pounds. On the average, though, from September first to February first an average cow weighed close to 400 pounds and bulls about 550 pounds. Some bulls did weigh up to 1,800 pounds during the summer. These are still statistics for a full-grown buffalo but in the fall a two-year heifer weighed close to 200 pounds and a yearling about 110 pounds.

[18]Ibid., pp. 174, 254; Masson, I, 174. Henry recounted one time when a prairie fire swept the plains and many buffalo had their hair singed off and their eyes swollen shut. They even ran into rocks and rolled down hills because of their blindness. Henry wrote that there was "an incredible number of dead and dying, blind, lame, singed, and roasted buffalo." In the spring they were also subject to drownings in the river. It was possible in the spring when the river cleared of ice to sit on the banks and watch a steady stream of drowned buffalo float downstream. This would go on for several days each year. John McDonnell, on the Assiniboine, wrote that he counted 7,360 buffaloes float by his post in a twenty-four hour period.

Bears were present along the Red River in two varieties, the grizzly and the black bear. Like the beaver and buffalo, the Indians had several methods of killing them. The first two were probably the greatest used, but the third was the most unique. Many times a dog was allowed to chase a bear until the bear became fatigued and nearly over-taken. The bear then generally climbed to the top of the tallest tree available and became easy prey for the hunter's gun. Bear were also easy prey in the spring when they frequented fishing places. All the hunters had to do was to set traps or lie in ambush and await the bears' arrival and shoot them.[19] The third method was used during the winter for both bear and raccoon. All hollow trees were examined. If it appeared as though the tree had been climbed recently, a hole was chopped in the tree. Often the animals climbed trees and found them unsuitable and left. A fire was built in the hole in order to see if there was an animal inside. If the bear or raccoon was still in the tree, the smoke obliged him to seek the hole through which he had entered. If he stuck his head out, the tree was felled and the animal captured.[20] The remainder of the fur-bearing animals--fox, lynx, marten, fisher, and others--were either shot or taken in traps.

The Indians were the main takers of furs, but the traders also hunted and trapped whenever time permitted. Henry wrote that one day his "men caught a fox, a fisher, and

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[19]Masson, II, 344-45. [20]Henry, I, 157.

two raccoons in their traps."[21] Another time he wrote: "All the men are setting traps along the river. They bring in daily some raccoons, foxes, fishers, and wolves, ..."[22] However, the Indians remained the main securers of furs.

After the furs were secured trading was usually a simple procedure. Generally the Indians would bring their packs to the post. Other times the traders would go to the Indian camps where they would trade or attempt to collect their credits. Whichever method was followed, a clerk or agent would be the judge of a skin's worth. He would, after ascertaining its value, credit the Indian's account in that amount or pay him in goods, rum, or a stick or token worth one prime beaver pelt. This was payable at any time.[23] No comparison of prices for furs and trade goods is available for the Red River.

Trading for the furs was a relatively simple task if the Indians could be kept hunting, but the Indians did not always hunt and trade without being encouraged. Gifts of tobacco, articles of clothing, and other trade goods were sometimes used to encourage them.[24] Chaboillez made it a practice to give a dram of liquor and one half fathom of tobacco to the Indians before trading.[25] On one occasion,

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[21] Ibid., p. 112. [22] Ibid., p. 122.

[23] All pelts were evaluated in terms of a prime beaver: one of perfect color, markings, texture, and condition. It might take three poorer quality skins to equal one of these prime pelts. This standard made trading easier.

[24] Davidson, p. 225. [25] Hickerson, p. 280.

after showing the Indians where the beaver were, Henry gave them each the following items so they would hunt: a scarlet laced coat, a laced hat, a white linen shirt, a red round feather, a pair of leggins, a breech cloth, a flag, a fathom of tobacco, and a nine gallon keg of rum.[26] On another occasion Henry and an Indian guide set out for Red Lake to find the Indians encamped in that area. Henry wanted to invite them to come and trade at one of his posts. They were able to find only one band, but he left tobacco with this band for them and the remainder of the bands.[27]

If the traders were able to keep the Indians hunting, their next worry was competition. No matter who the trader was or where his post was located, he was always suspicious of his competition and was ready to outmaneuver his competition whenever possible. Often ethics were almost entirely neglected and a "do-unto-others-before-he-does-unto-you" philosophy was adopted. Pelts were the commodity the traders desired, and their livlihood depended upon obtaining them. Fur trading was already a cold, hard business and only the strongest survived. Practically everything short of murder was used by the trader to get the Indians to trade with him. Alexander Henry went so far as to have a watchtower built fronting on the X. Y. Company near his Pembina post in order to watch the X. Y. Company's activities. Another time Henry sent a man off on horseback at midnight. It was very dark and raining slightly which Henry felt was the "most favorable

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[26]Henry, I, 56. [27]Ibid., pp. 128-31.

weather to escape the X. Y. Company who were on watch."[28]

Chaboillez gave another good example of the trader's suspicious nature. He was informed by an Indian that the Hudson's Bay Company, whom he opposed at Pembina, had kept a number of the Indians drinking all night while four Hudson's Bay Company men set off to trade. Chaboillez gathered up a pack of trade goods and went to find where they had gone.[29] He evidently went himself, feeling that there was not time to brief a voyageur on what to do after catching up to the Hudson's Bay Company men.

Building a post wherever the competition did was another way traders and companies attempted to compete successfully. It did not matter where a company built. If another company thought this post would prosper, it would also built there. In 1797-98 the North West Company had built at the Pembina River. Also located there was the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1804 Henry sent Augustin Cadotte to the Forest River to "oppose the X. Y."[30] Whether experienced men were available to maintain an outpost mattered little. Even the most inexperienced voyageur was better than none.

The growth of competition did not always lead to the best social ends. Any time men are placed in such close competition, strained relations almost always result. In many instances hostilities were released by fighting and quarreling among the men. On one occasion in 1803 Henry wrote: "Our men

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[28] Ibid., p. 253. [29] Hickerson, p. 367.

[30] Henry, I, 251.

and the X. Y. are fighting and quarreling."[31] The following year the life of Henry's servant, Bonga, was threatened by J. Duford of the X. Y. Company. Bonga escaped with only a sound beating. Indications point to the strained relations being most prominent with the X. Y. Company, probably because the North West Company and the X. Y. Company had originally been united and had separated over a personality conflict. Even when word was received in January 1805 of the coalition of the North West Company and the X. Y. Company, the X. Y. Company did not give up trading on the Red River. Crebassa, one of the principal men, persisted in telling the Indians that the report concerning the coalition was false, and that the next year the X. Y. Company would be stronger than ever. Henry wrote that in this manner "he [Crebassa] played the cheat to the last moment, when he was obliged to send all the remainder of his property, utensils, horses, and summer men over to my fort, on the embarkation."[32] In January 1805 Henry made the comment that he was pleased with the coalition of the X. Y. Company and the North West Company. He was confident that another year could not have passed without bloodshed with the Ojibwa since the X. Y. Company had increased competition to a crucial level.[33]

Sometimes it appeared as if even death, although not premeditated murder, was accepted as part of competition. In 1802 Henry mentioned that the X. Y. Company was starving even though buffaloes roamed near-by. He said that the X. Y.

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[31] Ibid., p. 211. [32] Ibid., p. 257. [33] Ibid.

Company men were forced to eat "the old scabby bulls we killed for our own diversion."[34] Henry had the only horses belonging to the three companies and would not purposely kill food for either the X. Y. Company or the Hudson's Bay Company.

Even this part of competition was not as feared as that of losing regular trade. To combat this it became habitual to give Indians goods on credit. Usually credit was given in the value of five to ten skins at one time, but occasionally the amount went up to twenty-five skins. The procedure followed by the Indians to obtain credit was simple. They asked the trader for needed supplies and the trader would give them the supplies after writing the value of the goods in a ledger.

To give an idea of the type and value of goods given on credit to the Indians, some typical credits from the journal of Chaboillez are listed below.[35]

GOODS GIVEN ON CREDIT	VALUE
1 measure powder, 1 measure shot, 1 measure balls, ½ fathom tobacco, 1 large knife	4 skins
1 small knife, 4 gunflints, 1 gunworm 2 Indian awls, 2 needles, 2 skeins thread, a little vermillion	1 skin
½ fathom tobacco, 1 measure powder, 1 measure shot, 1 large knife, 1 small knife, 4 gunflints, 1 Indian awl, 1 gunworm, 2 needles, 2 skeins thread, a little vermillion	5 skins
1 foot tobacco, 2 measures ammunition	4 1/3 skins

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[34] Ibid., p. 193. [35] Hickerson, pp. 278-79.

1 measure powder, 1 measure shot,
1 measure balls, 1 large knife, 1 awl,
1 gunworm, 2 flints, ½ fathom tobacco,
1 needle, 1 skein thread 5 skins

Although the above are typical individual credits, some individuals did receive larger credits. Examples of these are: Gavin Bouche--25 skins credit, Assadaye--25 skins credit, LaCharite--17 skins credit, and Challifoux---12 skins credit.[36] The credits up to five skins were for small goods while larger credits were usually for hunting, trapping, and cooking equipment. Included in these would have been guns, traps, axes, and kettles.

From all available information the traders on the Red River relied heavily upon credit. On September 18, 1797, Chaboillez gave 10 skins credit, the next day 49 1/3, and on September 25 it was up to 89. On October 11 it went up tp 327 in one day and the next day to 190½.[37] Giving credit in this amount suggests that Chaboillez had greater confidence that all the debts were going to be paid than did Henry.

As the season progressed and the traders felt the Indians had sufficient time to accumulate furs covering part of their debt, the traders often went out on what was known as an "en drouine." "As the hunting season advanced the trader gave his engagés a few day's rations and sent them to follow the Indians on the chase, in order that his credits might be collected at once and any competition

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[36] Ibid. [37] Ibid., pp. 278, 279, 283, 282.

forestalled."[38] This mid-season collection was necessary because the Indians were liable to sell the furs to one company even though they already had been pledged to another. Many instances of this practice occurred. In the winter of 1800 traders in the Swan River Department were trading with the Red River Indians. These Indians had already taken credits for their furs but were taking them to the Swan River traders from whom they received new credits instead of settling their old debts.[39]

This practice also went on between companies located in the same area. In December 1797 Chaboillez was informed that the Hudson's Bay Company was off to trade with Indians to whom he had given credit. Upon hearing this he took two gallons of high wine (brandy) and set off to follow the Hudson's Bay Company men.and try to get his credits.[40] All traders seemed to complain of this practice but apparently no party was beyond assuming the role of credit-stealer. In 1804 Henry, the trader who often complained about the tactics of the other companies, assumed the role of the rogue. He wrote that he went

> to meet a band of Indians returning from hunting beaver, and fought several battles with the women to get their furs from them. It was the most disagreeable derouine [sic] I have ever made, ... It is true it was all my neighbor's debts.[41]

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[38]Louis Arthur Tohill, "Robert Dickson, British Fur Trader on the Upper Mississippi: A Story of Trade, War, and Diplomacy" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Minnesota, 1926), p. 14.

[39]Gates, pp. 144-45n. [40]Hickerson, p. 292.

[41]Henry, I, 239-40.

Drouines were employed to combat this problem but they were not always successful. Many times few furs were obtained. The location of Indians having debts was often unknown. During the winter it was a risky business to start into the prairies to look for the Indians. More than likely food would be in short supply and no shelter would be available. Even during the spring and fall when the trader could sleep without shelter, the danger of a buffalo stampede or an attack by the Sioux existed.

Although many of the Indians paid their debts faithfully and a large portion of the remainder could be collected by the drouine, the giving of credit was a risky venture. It was a great temptation for the Indians to sell their pelts to another company which would give them new goods because the goods for which they owed their debts were already gone.

Other methods beside credit were preferred by traders to obtain furs. Many times they merely brought trade goods to the tents of the various Indians and outbid their competitors. This was usually done when the trader was informed that a few Indians were encamped near the post. An instance of this was when Richards, of the North West Company, along with three other men, set off with trade goods valued at eighty skins to trade with the Indians and immediately the Hudson's Bay Company followed.[42] The reverse of this happened when the English left their Pembina post to meet a few Indians. On this occasion Chaboillez sent two voyageurs

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[42]Hickerson, p. 364.

to follow the Hudson's Bay Company men.[43] This procedure was common practice, and it seems that most of the traders adhered to it for survival. There was nothing unethical about it. It was just sound business attempting to outbid a competitor. It was even more satisfactory if trade could be carried on with the Indians without the competitor learning of it.

Not only the various traders took advantage of competition, but the Indians as well. On one occasion two Indians came to Chaboillez to trade skins but would not take less than the "South Traders" would give. Chaboillez said that he was sure he had traded below invoice price but he did not want the pelts to be traded at one of his competitor's posts. On another occasion Chaboillez was unhappy with the voyageurs Delorme and Desjardiax for not bringing in more pelts from a trading adventure. Their account of the shortage was that the "South Traders" were also present and that they had to give the Indians the same price as the "South Traders" or lose all the pelts.[44] Another time two Indians paid Chaboillez some skins on account and then wanted to trade ten skins for a large keg of unmixed rum. When Chaboillez refused, they "went off to the English."[45]

This type of competition was extremely degrading to the moral character of the Indians. In 1805 Henry wrote: "This kind of commerce had ruined and corrupted the natives

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[43] Ibid., p. 383. [44] Ibid., p. 290.

[45] Ibid., p. 365.

to such a degree that there was no bearing their insolence; if they misbehaved at our houses and were checked for it, our neighbors were ready to approve their scoundrelly behavior and encourage them to mischief, even offering them protection, ..."[46]

No statistics are available concerning how companies succeeded in the competition along the Red River, but figures are available for the dividends of the Hudson's Bay Company across Canada. It must be remembered, though, that these are for the entire company, not just the Red River territory. In the latter part of the 1700's they were able to issue a dividend of 8 percent. From 1800 to 1808 this dividend dropped to 4 percent and from 1809 to 1824 they issued no dividend.[47] Competition was the telling ingredient in the collapse of the X. Y. Company and eventually of the North West Company. In the early days of the Canadian trade the Hudson's Bay Company had little success. It admitted that it was no equal to the French Canadian voyageurs in zeal and adaptability to the adventurous life. It was not until the Hudson's Bay Company was able to incorporate some of the voyageurs and clerks from the ranks of the Canadians into its company that it was able to finish on top.

Even with the growth of competition some cooperation existed. This cooperation was not the kind that would create

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[46]Henry, I, 256.

[47]Arthur Silver Morton, A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons Limited, ca. 1938), p. 531.

close personal friends, and seldom even business friends. Being a personal acquaintance or friend was more a matter of necessity than choice. White men were few and some relaxation and recreation was necessary. Once in a while it appears that the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company were on fairly good business terms. This became more evident after the coalition of the North West Company and the X. Y. Company in 1804. In the fall of 1805 Henry made a verbal agreement with Miller of the Hudson's Bay Company not to give the Indians liquor for mischief and not to encourage mischief as the X. Y. Company had done. The next spring one of the Hudson's Bay Company boats even took forty pieces of Henry's furs as far as the Forks.[48] A North West Company boat did, however, accompany the Hudson's Bay Company boats.

Before this the only known instance of cooperation was between the North West Company and the "South Traders" during the winter of 1797-98. This cooperation extended even farther than personal and/or business friendship as it included the loaning of goods. In November 1797 Chaboillez made a loan to Vincent Roy upon the latter's request of the following trade articles to augment his low supply.[49]

4 eyed dogs
3 hand dogs
4 double crosses
4 single crosses
2 pair arm bands
50 pair ear bobs
2 Hudson's Bay shrouds
5 three-point Hudson's Bay blankets
½ dozen butcher knives
1 white ruffled shirt
216 small and large broaches

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[48]Henry, I, 275. [49]Hickerson, p. 287.

Another time Roy sent Cotté for a large keg of high wine and a bunch of white beads. This apparently was more than just an agreement between Roy and Chaboillez. One time when Roy asked for a large keg of wine, one velvet beaded hat, and one knit cap, Chaboillez wrote to Cadotte, the "South Trader" at Red Lake, and to John Sayer, the employer of Roy and Cadotte, telling them that he had charged Cadotte for the supplies that Roy had gotten.[50] Several times during that winter Roy applied to Chaboillez for supplies. One time when Roy was short on provisions, Chaboillez even divided the remainder of his provisions with him.

These instances between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company and the "South Traders" apparently were isolated cases of cooperation. The usual policy companies followed was highly competitive. Each company tried to out-propagandize the other in hopes of obtaining the services of the Indians. This still did not guarantee furs to trade, for hunting and trapping were difficult processes. But without the Indians' services, the trading companies would have collapsed.

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[50] Ibid., p. 369. John Sayer was a trader at Fond du Lac, present Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

CHAPTER III

LIQUOR

No other man-made facet played a greater role in the Red River fur trade than did liquor. Until its introduction the Indians were able to retain most of their aboriginal culture. Within a few years after its introduction their culture, which had taken centuries to build, began to crumble. It is doubtful whether any nation or nations had been so completely overwhelmed by a single factor as the Indians in the Northwest were by liquor. Before the White man brought "fire-water" the Indians had led quiet, honest lives which never existed again. Traders said it was the price the Indians had to pay for the better things of life. If this was the price, it certainly was high. Whatever the case, liquor, or more properly rum and high wine (brandy), became the backbone of the fur trade in the Northwest and on the Red River.

By the late 1700's and the early 1800's when a post ran short on liquor, the traders began preparing to close for the season. On May 5, 1798, Chaboillez said that the Hudson's Bay Company and the "South Traders" had closed shop. They were out of liquor.[1] The same year Chaboillez had

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[1] Hickerson, p. 386.

written his superiors that he was short of liquor and would soon be closing the post and heading for Grand Portage.[2]

To gain its important status liquor was used in a variety of ways. One way it was used was as trade goods. Elliot Coues, the editor of Alexander Henry's journal, wrote that it was not uncommon for Indians on the Red River to give five or six prime beaver pelts for a quart of "Saulteur liquor."[3] Tanner collaborated this statement. In 1794 his family paid six skins per quart of rum.[4] On another occasion one of Henry's men bought 120 beaver pelts from an Indian for 2 Hudson's Bay blankets, a pocket looking glass, and 8 quarts of rum, probably mixed. The goods given in trade were worth approximately $30.00 and the pelts about $400.00.[5] Usually the Indians were not too concerned about getting cheated. They wanted liquor to drink and lost all sense of value when confronted with it. Lasting material goods must have been beyond their thoughts at times like that.

Not only furs were bartered for with liquor, but horses and dogs as well. In August 1800 Henry wrote: "I purchased a horse from them Snake Indians for a 9-gallon keg of mixed rum, and one of my people bought another for the same price."[6] On another occasion an Indian sold Henry

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[2]Gates, p. 170.

[3]Henry, I, 3n. A quart of mixed liquor consisted of one half to one pint of alcohol and the rest water. It was a common practice to water all liquor given to the tribes.

[4]James, p. 40. [5]Henry, I, 68.

[6]Ibid., p. 47.

a horse for a keg of liquor and then tried to get Henry to marry his eldest daughter, age nine, in hopes of another keg. Henry declined the offer but to keep the friendship of the Indian gave him a dram (about one-eighth pint) of liquor.[7] Dogs were purchased in a similar manner.[8] The dogs were used for hunting, as pets, for food, and for pulling sleighs in the winter.

Liquor was also used as a thank-you gesture for trading with the company. In 1798 Chaboillez gave an Indian a dram and a piece of tobacco after he brought in twelve skins which he traded for two gallons of rum.[9] Another time he sent two voyageurs up the Tongue River to meet a group of Indians coming toward Pembina. They were instructed to give the Indians a six gallon keg of rum if they would bring their skins to the North West Company.[10] Henry followed this same procedure but added the giving of large amounts of liquor gratis in the spring before he left for the summer rendezvous. In 1801 he "assembled them all, and gave them five kegs of mixed rum gratis, besides clothing to the two chiefs."[11] It was not mandatory that either of these procedures be followed but it was these little favors that impressed and won favor with the Indians.

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[7] Ibid., p. 58. [8] Ibid., p. 73.

[9] Hickerson, p. 382.

[10] Ibid., p. 383. The two voyageurs were Bertrand and Challoux.

[11] Henry, I, 80.

Giving liquor to encourage hunting was another practice using alcohol. In September 1800 Henry wrote: "I gave them one keg of mixed rum to encourage them to pay their debts and to hunt."[12] Many times the Indians would decide that hunting and trading were strenuous work and an easier way of life was for them. When a trader found this attitude prevailing, he would approach the Indians with liquor. With liquor and a few words of encouragement they would usually return to hunting. One season seven Indians from the Roseau River came to Henry's post and sat idle. Henry was angered with them for leaving the Roseau post and becoming idle. A few harsh words transpired but before they returned Henry had given them a nine-gallon keg on the condition that they would hunt and pay their debts.[13]

It was not any particuliar tribe that was handled in this manner but the majority of them. In 1808 members of the Assiniboine, Cree, Sonnant, and Ojibwa tribes were ready to return to their hunting grounds. Before they left to hunt they requested a "departing drop." Henry obliged them with a ten-gallon keg gratis.[14] The North West Company was not alone in this practice. In the fall of 1804 approximately one hundred Indians were encamped along the Pembina. Henry gave them fifteen kegs of mixed liquor and the X. Y. Company gave in proportion: . . . ."[15]

A third way alcohol was used as encouragement was

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[12] Ibid., p. 98. [13] Ibid., p. 134.

[14] Ibid., p. 429. [15] Ibid., p. 251.

giving it after a hunter had taken credit from a post. Receiving liquor "was customary on their taking debts."[16] In 1797 "after giving the Indians goods on credit [Chaboillez] gave each Indian 3 pints of mixed rum to encourage them to work."[17] Another time he gave thirteen Indians each one pint of rum "to encourage them" after giving them 327 beaver skins credit.[18] The Indians would work without encouragement but worked faster with the added incentive.

Lamentation after death also required liquor. It was evidently the wish of the Indians to forget the deceased. For this alcohol was a better or quicker method than any other. Liquor for this purpose was sometimes purchased. When the wife of a former guide of Henry's died, a young hunter brought a few skins to purchase rum.[19] Other times the traders were obliged to supply it gratis. In 1801 an Indian brought his deceased wife down from the Pembina Mountains to be buried near the Pembina posts. Henry wrote: "It cost me a large keg of mixed liquor, ..."[20] It apparently was expected for a trader to supply the liquor if the Indians had been trading with him.

Payment of gratitude for favors was still another category where alcohol was used. Indians acting as guides were paid in that manner. Instead of being paid in gun powder, kettles, blankets, or anything useful, they were given

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[16] Ibid., p. 58. [17] Hickerson, p. 279.

[18] Ibid., p. 282. [19] Henry, I, 156, 190.

[20] Ibid., p. 190.

liquor. In 1798 Chaboillez paid three-quarters of a keg of mixed rum to an Indian who guided him to and from the Souris River.[21] Two years later Henry requested that his Indian guides accompany him to find the Indians around Grand Forks. Since it was dangerous to venture into the Sioux country, each Indian was given one-half keg of liquor for his services.[22] Another time Henry made a present of three kegs of mixed liquor to the Ojibwa who came close to his post to hunt. They could then bring their furs to the North West Company.[23]

The last use of liquor was as a welcome and farewell gift. Each spring when the traders left and each fall when they returned from their rendezvous a gift of liquor was given to the Indians. That way the trader's arrival was looked forward to with excitement. In the spring of 1802 Henry gave eight chiefs "clothing and kegs of liquor."[24] This was exclusive of four kegs that he had given away in a drinking bout a few days before.[25] That fall he wrote: "I gave them their usual autumnal present; all were soon intoxicated."[26]

The impact of liquor made its mark on the culture of the trading Indians on the Red River: degradation. Drinking matches or bouts occurred frequently during which the Indians would drink themselves into an unconscious state. Before they

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[21] Hickerson, p. 381. The Souris River flows through north central North Dakota and into Manitoba empyting into the Assiniboine.

[22] Henry, I, 136. [23] Ibid., p. 71.

[24] Ibid., p. 196. [25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., p. 204.

reached that state violence was common. One evening during one of these bouts an Indian shot an arrow at his wife. It entered her right side below the ribs and was pulled out through the left side. He then fired another at her supposed lover which went through his arm.[27] During another bout Tabashaw, an Ojibwa chief, stabbed a close relative in six different places in the breast and side. Each stab wound was as deep as the handle. His victim lasted about two hours before expiring. In this same match two others began to fight and shortly one was thrown into the fire and "roasted terribly from his neck to his rump."[28] One three-day bout was summed up by Henry. He said it had been "drink, fight--drink, fight--drink, fight again--guns, axes, and knives their weapons--very disagreeable."[29]

Not only had the "firewater" turned the Indians into fighting drunks, but in many cases they had become virtual alcoholics. They even attempted robbery to fulfill their need for alcohol. About midnight one night Henry was awakened by an Ojibwa chopping on the main gate with an axe and bawling for someone to let him in. He wanted liquor.[30] This might have been more of an exception than a rule. Under the existing circumstances it would not have been surprising if all the Indians acted in that manner.

Though the traders realized the effects of their techniques, they readily defended their actions. The North West

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[27] Ibid., p. 168. [28] Ibid., p. 209.

[29] Ibid., p. 273. [30] Ibid., p. 105.

Company said that the custom was so firmly established that three-fourths of their trading would be lost if the use of liquor was eliminated. Many of their trading Indians were within the areas claimed by the United States and the American traders would get the trade.[31] Duncan M'Gillivray, a partner in the North West Company, said that liquor was necessary because "when a nation becomes addicted to drinking it affords a strong assumption that they soon become excellent hunters."[32] His assumption was that the more liquor the Indians desired, the greater number of pelts they would bring to the posts.

Even though the use of liquor was encouraged by the companies, Alexander Begg, a noted historian on the fur trade, wrote that as a general rule no trading was done while the Indians were under the influence of alcohol.[33] His generalization may be too broad for some areas but he was correct for the Red River country. Possibly the traders were not entirely without ethics. Another possibility is that they feared repercussions after the Indians had sobered up and found their packs gone.

The companies were not too concerned with the degenerating condition of the Indians but apparently some traders were. Henry speaking in 1803 of the high death rate among the Ojibwa, said that they

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[31] Davidson, p. 224. [32] Innis, p. 235.

[33] Alexander Begg, The History of the North-West (3 vols.; Toronto: Hunter Rose and Co., 1894), I, 137.

> totally neglect their ancient customs; and to what can this degeneracy be ascribed but to their intercourse with us, particularly as they are so unfortunate as to have a continual succession of opposition parties to teach them roguery and destroy both the mind and body with that pernicious article, rum? What a different set of people they would be were there not a drop of liquor in the country! If a murder is committed. . . it is always in a drinking match. We may truly say that liquor is the root of all evil in the North West.[34]

Henry hit the heart of the problem.

If doubt still lingers that liquor was not used in excess the statistics below should qualify these doubts. These statistics are for the entire North West Company, but give an adequate picture of the proportions involved.[35]

GALLONS PER YEAR USED IN TRADING

1793-98	9,600
1799-	10,189
1800	10,098
1801	10,539
1802	14,850
1803	16,299
1804	12,168
1805	13,500
1806	10,800
1807	9,500
1808	9,000

To get the actual number of gallons given to the Indians these quantities must be multiplied by the ratio of water added to make mixed liquor. The ratio for the Red River Indians varied from one to four to one to eight. They were not given the weakest mixture either; the Blackfoot were consistently given a one to nine mixture.[36]

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[34]Henry, I, 209. [35]Innis, p. 269.

[36]Ibid., p. 235.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE ON THE RED RIVER

Life on the Red River differed little from the life of a fur trader anywhere in the Northwest. It was a hard life with few of the pleasures and conveniences that were common to people living in Europe. The trader began his day at sunrise and ended it at sunset seven days a week with practically no differentiation between days. The summers were hot but enjoyable with plenty to eat, but the winters were extremely cold with food often scarce. Each spring there was one thing to look forward to--the trip to Grand Portage and later to Fort William for the North West Company and the X. Y. Company or to York Factory for the Hudson's Bay Company.

When not on their spring rendezvous trips, their lives revolved around their assigned posts. In a typical North West Company post the clerk or the partner in charge usually decided upon a location and directed the building of the post. In an outpost this task was delegated to a voyageur. After a site was chosen, the buildings were erected in the following order: storehouse, shop, clerk or partner's house, voyageurs' dwellings, and finally the stockade. Later, as time permitted, such structures as root houses, a powder magazine, stable, and flagstaff were added. The buildings

were constructed by laying grooved logs on top of each other. The cracks between were filled with caulking made of white clay or, in the case of the Red River country, coarse black mud. The interior of the buildings consisted of puncheon floors, bunks against the walls, rough tables and stools, and oil cloth for the windows.[1] All this work might be done for a single winter's use. Alexander Henry wrote that "the gentlemen of the North West Company are so fond of shifting their buildings that a place is scarcely settled before it is thrown up and planted elsewhere."[2]

After the post was completed, the next task was the establishment and maintainence of serviceable equipment and an elaborate transportation system. Competition made prime equipment a necessity for the transporting of furs and trade goods. Foot transportation was used but neither enough manpower was available nor was it fast enough to be relied upon exclusively. To offset this liability horses were used on the plains. When Henry had come to the Red River in 1800 the Indians had no horses, but by the time he left in 1808 horses were plentiful enough that horse stealing existed.[3] During the winter, when horses could not be used, snowshoes and sleighs made by the men were substituted.[4]

For water travel the canoe was used almost exclusively.

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[1] Grace Lee Nute, "Posts in the Minnesota Fur Trading Area 1660-1855," Minnesota History (Saint Paul, 1930), XI, 353.

[2] Henry, I, 298. [3] Ibid., p. 295.

[4] Ibid., p. 155.

The canoes, which were usually made by the Indians living in the wooded area east of the Red River, were constructed of birch bark hulls and cedar ribs, gunnels, and lacing. Although of immeasureable value, they were delicate and needed the best care or they would be punctured or even destroyed. During the winter they were brought ashore and stored in one of two ways. Henry wrote that he "had . . . three canoes put in safety for the winter, . . . , bottom upward, on three cross poles, and well covered with about a foot thick of straw, having loosened the ribs."[5] Chaboillez buried his canoes. He said if he did not they would dry out and crack, making them impossible to use the next spring.[6] The method did not matter as long as the canoe did not dry out and the birch bark contract enough to make it crack and split.

One variation of the birch bark canoe found occasionally was that made with a buffalo skin hull. Henry said that such canoes were constructed by stretching one or two buffalo skins over a frame of willow and lashing them in place with leather. The canoes could be heavily loaded but had to be taken ashore at least once a day and dried thoroughly or they would become saturated and sink. Actually they were only a temporary vessel used to get furs to a trading post as "they are only fit for drifting down the current."[7]

In 1801 the Red River cart made its first appearance

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[5] Ibid., p. 152. [6] Hickerson, p. 383.

[7] Henry, I, 181.

on the river. In September 1801 Henry wrote that he had "sent Langlois with four men and five small carts, each drawn by one horse, loaded with three packs of goods and baggage" to the Hair Hills.[8] Two months later he again mentioned using carts which were "more convenient and advantageous than . . . to lead horses."[9] The first carts held only 270 pounds and had solid wheels approximately three feet high. Later a variation was adapted with spoked wheels about four feet high which would carry 450 pounds.[10] The carts themselves consisted of a solid bottom with three sides and an axle under the middle with a wheel on each side. Evidently the traders found them satisfactory. Henry wrote that "this invention is worth four horses to us, as it would require five horses to carry as much on their backs as one will in each of the large carts."[11] Even the "freemen" used the carts when they brought cartloads of grease to Pembina in 1808.

Once their transportation systems were organized, the companies were able to leave each spring with fair to good returns. Following is a list indicating the volume of the returns.[12]

1797-98	three canoes	North West Company
1800-01	four canoes	"
1801-02	four canoes	"
1802-03	none	
1803-04	eight canoes	North West Company
1803-04	eight canoes	X. Y. Company
1804-05	ten canoes	North West Company

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[8] Ibid., p. 186. [9] Ibid., p. 191.

[10] Ibid., p. 205. [11] Ibid., p. 211.

[12] Ibid., pp. 184, 198, 221, 245, 259, 281, 422, 440.

1805-06	eight canoes	North West Company
1806-07	six canoes	"
1807-08	three canoes	"

No record remains of the yearly value of the furs taken from the Red River.[13] But assuming there were fourteen to twenty packs in each canoe, and taking the approximate value of Red River packs as £30 per pack, a rough estimate can be made.[14] In the peak year of 1804-05 the value of the pelts was between £4200 and £6000. The prices fluctuated from year to year depending on the cost of the operation and the European market. Thus the yearly value from a single post is practically indeterminable.

Trade hit its peak during the 1804-05 season. It fell the next year when disease began taking its toll on the beaver. In January 1805 Henry wrote that the country was almost "destitute of beaver and other furs."[15] In about 1805 John Tanner recalled that

> some kind of distemper was prevailing among these animals, which destroyed them in vast numbers. I found them dead and dying in the water, on the ice, and on the land; sometimes I found that one who had drawn a stick of timber half way to his lodge was lying dead by his burden; sometimes I found one that, having cut a tree half down, had died at its roots. Many of them that I opened, were red and bloody about the heart. Those in large rivers and running waters suffered less; almost all those who lived in ponds and stagnant water died. Since that year the beaver have never been so plentiful in the country of the Red River and Hudson Bay, as they used formerly to be.[16]

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[13]For a more complete account of the returns see Appendix C.

[14]Thirty pounds is as near a value determination as can be made from existing material. This value would vary from year to year and from pack to pack.

[15]Henry, I, 256. [16]James, p. 104.

Adding further to the decline of trade in the Red River country, in March 1805 Henry was informed that a party of soldiers commanded by Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike had entered the territory. Pike was informing all traders on American soil that they had to pay duties on goods brought into American territory. Although the traders usually refused to pay these duties they slowly left the American territory.[17]

Even assuming that the trade would eventually decline and the system of transportation and trading thus built would be abandoned, voyageurs continually worked hard to secure the furs. They put forth a supreme effort for a minimum of individual monetary return. In 1805 a guide on the Red River was paid 600-750 livre, a steersman 450-600 livre, a middleman 150-300 livre, and a clerk 100-300 livre and a share of the profits plus an option for partnership at the end of his five to seven years apprenticeship. Two blankets, two shirts, two pairs of trousers, and tobacco were also included.[18] The bourgeois, usually in charge of the main post, was paid around 1200 livre and his share of the company's profit.

Low pay necessitated the practice of indenturing. One time Chaboillez wrote: "Nothing new engaged Dubois for Six Years at £200 [for the] first five Years and the last £250 [for a position as] Steersman and Brought down is [sic] Debt of 1150."[19] Low pay resulted in thievery and pilfering being prevalent with the common voyageurs and Orkneymen. In

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[17]Henry, I, 274. [18]Innis, pp. 239-40.

[19]Hickerson, p. 376.

1804 J. Cameron, a clerk in charge of the Park River post, died. Henry was unable to find the account book and realized there had been foul play and embezzlement.[20] Men were not hired for their purity of ethics.

Their homes consisted of one of four things: space in a quarters building, a tent, under a canoe, or under the stars. No matter in which of these they lived, the health standards were poor. The men were heavily plagued with fleas which the dogs had picked up, and disease was common. The most common disorder involved a lingering cough accompanied by spitting and pains in the chest which caused the traders and the Indians to become lean and finally die. Henry called this disorder pulmonary consumption.[21]

Almost as foreboding as the threat of illness was the threat of fires. Many times Henry mentioned the prairie being ablaze. Only once, in 1804, did he mention his stockade catching fire. With the help of some Indians this fire was quickly extinguished and little damage resulted.[22] Attacks by the Sioux, although seldom serious, were also menacing.[23]

Obtaining provisions was one of the most urgent and continuing problems. One way the traders combated this problem was to plant gardens. In 1803, before Henry left for Fort William, he planted potatoes, turnips, carrots, beets, parsnips, onions, and cabbage. His garden yielded: 10 bushels

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[20] Henry, I, 235. [21] Ibid., pp. 203-04.

[22] Ibid., p. 242. [23] Ibid., p. 228.

of turnips, 8 bushels of carrots, 16 bushels of onions, 300 heads of cabbage, 420 bushels of potatoes, some beets, and some parsnips. If this does not appear to have been a satisfactory harvest consider some statistics concerning the yield. The potatoes were from only seven bushels of seed, one carrot measured 18 inches in length and 14 inches in circumference, one onion measured 22 inches in circumference, and one of the turnips with leaves still on weighed 25 pounds. Even with this yield Henry figured the Indians had stolen another 200 bushels of potatoes.[24] He evidently did not appreciate this stealing as in December of that year he had his men cut 3,000 pickets each 8 feet in length to enclose his potato patch.[25]

The next year Henry's yield was even larger:[26]

1,000	bushels of	potatoes
40	"	turnips
25	"	carrots
20	"	beets
20	"	parsnips
10	"	cucumbers
2	"	melons
5	"	squash
10	"	Indian corn
100	heads of large cabbage	
300	heads of small and Savoy cabbage	

This yield was exclusive of that which had been destroyed and stolen. From this crop Henry made a nine-gallon keg of pickles using the vinegar from the maple sap.[27] Considering Henry's yield, it was quite possibly a matter of survival during the winter for all companies to have had gardens.

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[24] Ibid. [25] Ibid., p. 232. [26] Ibid., p. 252.

[27] Ibid., p. 250.

But the companies might not have all had gardens because Henry mentioned the X. Y. Company starving one winter. This might indicate that the X. Y. Company relied entirely on fresh meat. If so, they lacked much foresight.

Fresh eggs were another commodity that at least the North West Company men had some years. One year Henry wrote that a hen hatched eleven of her twelve eggs.[28] Their poultry diet was far smaller than their fish diet. The Red River abounded with fish as most rivers did before the White settlers overtook the area. No mention was made of all the varieties of fish, but sturgeon, lacaishe, catfish, brim, achegan, dore, and several other varieties of pike were commonly caught. Some days up to 300 lacaishe were caught on the Red and its tributaries. Ten to twenty sturgeon were an average day's catch. On one occasion in twenty-four hours 120 sturgeon were taken by net, weighing from 60 to 150 pounds each.[29] Nets and traps were sometimes used but hook and line was the most common fishing method. Fish were never a steady diet but "the industrious at that employ caught a sufficient number to relieve their hunger."[30]

Buffalo meat supplied a nearly steady diet for the men, not only for the fresh meat but for pemmican and dried meat as well.[31] Henry observed that the men often amused

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[28] Ibid., p. 429. [29] Ibid. [30] Gates, p. 108.

[31] Henry, I, 174. Pemmican was a mixture of approximately fifty pounds of dried buffalo meat with forty pounds of grease. Sometimes dried berries were added to the mixture but the original pemmican consisted of only the two ingredients. After it was prepared, it was packed in ninety pound sacks.

themselves

> by lying in wait close under the bank for buffaloes which came to drink. When the poor brutes came to within about 10 yards of us . . . we would fire a volley of 25 guns at them, killing and wounding many, of which we took only the tongues.[32]

Taking only the tongue was common during the summer when the traders or Indians had plenty of meat and hunted merely as a sport. Then when winter came and they were able to store meat, they often ran short. This was a big problem in the Northwest, and many people died for lack of food during the winter when hunting was poor.

The Red and Assiniboine river regions were the main suppliers of pemmican for voyageurs traveling between Grand Portage and the Athabaska country.[33] Pemmican was the voyageur's food while canoeing. In 1808 Henry had so many sacks of pemmican he had to build a special boat to carry it to the North West Company post at the mouth of the Winnipeg River where it was stored.[34] The yearly returns of pemmican for the North West Company were as follows:[35]

1800-01	6,930	pounds
1801-02	8,100	"
1802-03	8,550	"
1803-04	4,770	"
1804-05	11,250	"
1805-06	21,150	"
1806-07	10,440	"
1807-08	30,060	"

The season of 1807-08 at Henry's Pembina post gives

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[32] Ibid., p. 67. [33] Morton, p. 439.

[34] Henry, I, 429.

[35] Ibid., pp. 184, 198, 221, 245, 259, 281, 422, 440.

an idea of the actual quantity of food consumed at a post during a season. That season 17 men, 10 women, 14 children, and 45 dogs consumed 64,965 pounds of fresh meat, 1,150 small fish, 775 sturgeon, 410 pounds of grease, 325 bushels of potatoes and vegetables, and other assorted fowl.[36] The cost of the foregoing provisions to Henry was £54 6 shillings.[37]

The fauna of the region also appears to have been remarkable although detail is lacking. The countryside was literally swarming with buffalo, deer, moose, elk, lynx, fox, beaver, and other animals. Even animals which are practically unheard of in the region today, such as the bear, were numerous in 1800. Grizzly bear were frequently found in the Pembina Mountains and as far west as present Devils Lake, North Dakota, where they were as "common . . . as the black bear."[38] In 1800 Henry wrote that bear "dung lies about in the woods as plentiful as that of the buffalo in the meadow."[39] Also plentiful were ducks, pheasants, swan, geese, pigeons, and heron.

The flora was likewise attractive. On the west side of the Red River stood oak, ash, alder, cottonwood, basswood, and elm trees. Chaboillez suggested the area had once been a pine forest since many charred pine stumps were still visible.[40] On the east bank the low poplars and willow

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[36] Ibid., p. 444. Figuring equal proportions of food for everbody including the dogs, it comes to four to five pounds a day per person.

[37] Ibid., p. 445. [38] Ibid., p. 121.

[39] Ibid., p. 101. [40] Thompson, p. 248.

intersected with marshes, stagnant ponds, and small rivers.[41] Being virgin timber its size would have been outstanding. The countryside was not covered with forests but from all indications trees were more plentiful than they are today. Today only narrow strips remain along the rivers behind which lie the rolling prairies either covered with short grass or being cultivated. Henry described the region as having

> plenty of water for navigation, an excellent, fertile soil, and the best of wood for every purpose. Tall oaks . . . , as straight as a reed, without a branch for 30 to 50 feet from the ground. The laird is of extraordinary size; I have measured them of seven fathoms circumference, at five feet from the ground. The elm and bois blanc are also very large, as so are many of the ashes. There is abundance of wood on the banks of the river to answer every purpose for ages to come.[42]

Possibly the life on the Red River appears to have been an easy life. This was not the case. Voyageurs and Orkneymen, if they reached forty years of age, were weather-beaten, crippled, and stooped being barely able to walk. Even the Indians had a short life expectancy. The fur trade will stand second to none in demanding physical stamina and determination.

The trader's job in the fur trading operation was difficult but it was also unique in the Red River region. The traders in the vicinity were carrying on trade in an area claimed by both the United States and Great Britain. This was evidenced by United States duty collectors attempting to collect duty on incoming trade goods and by the Hudson's Bay Company ceding Lord Selkirk land which is now part of the

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[41] Henry, I, 48. [42] Ibid., p. 149.

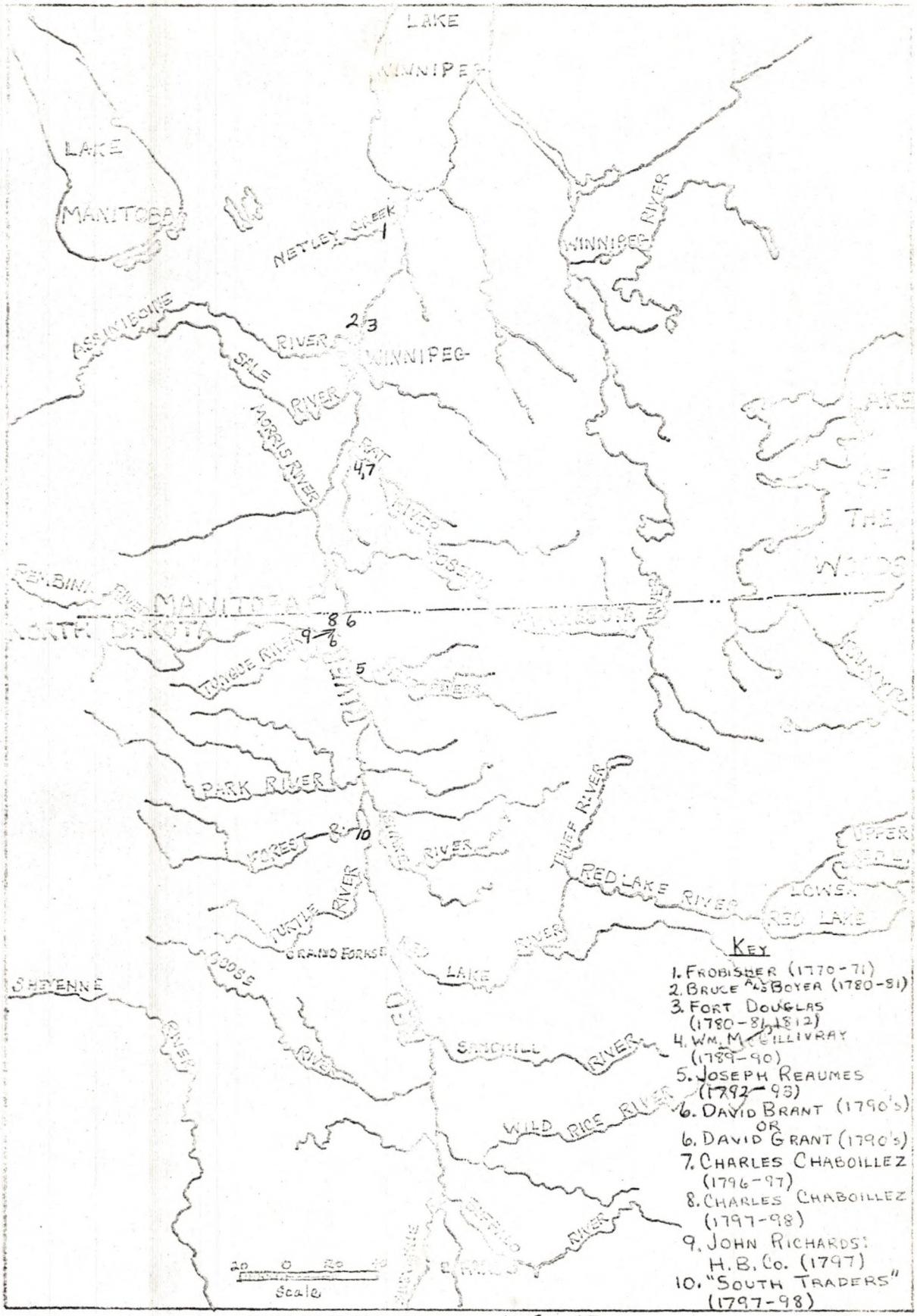
United States. The situation of not knowing whose land it actually was continued to exist well into the 1800's because neither the United States nor Great Britain had troops enough or was interested enough to take direct action and exert its claim.

The Red River Valley trade was not connected in any way with the United States fur trade. The territory was first explored by the French, it was developed by the French and British traders, and its fur-bearing population was secured by French and British traders before the United States fur trade began to develop in the same vicinity.

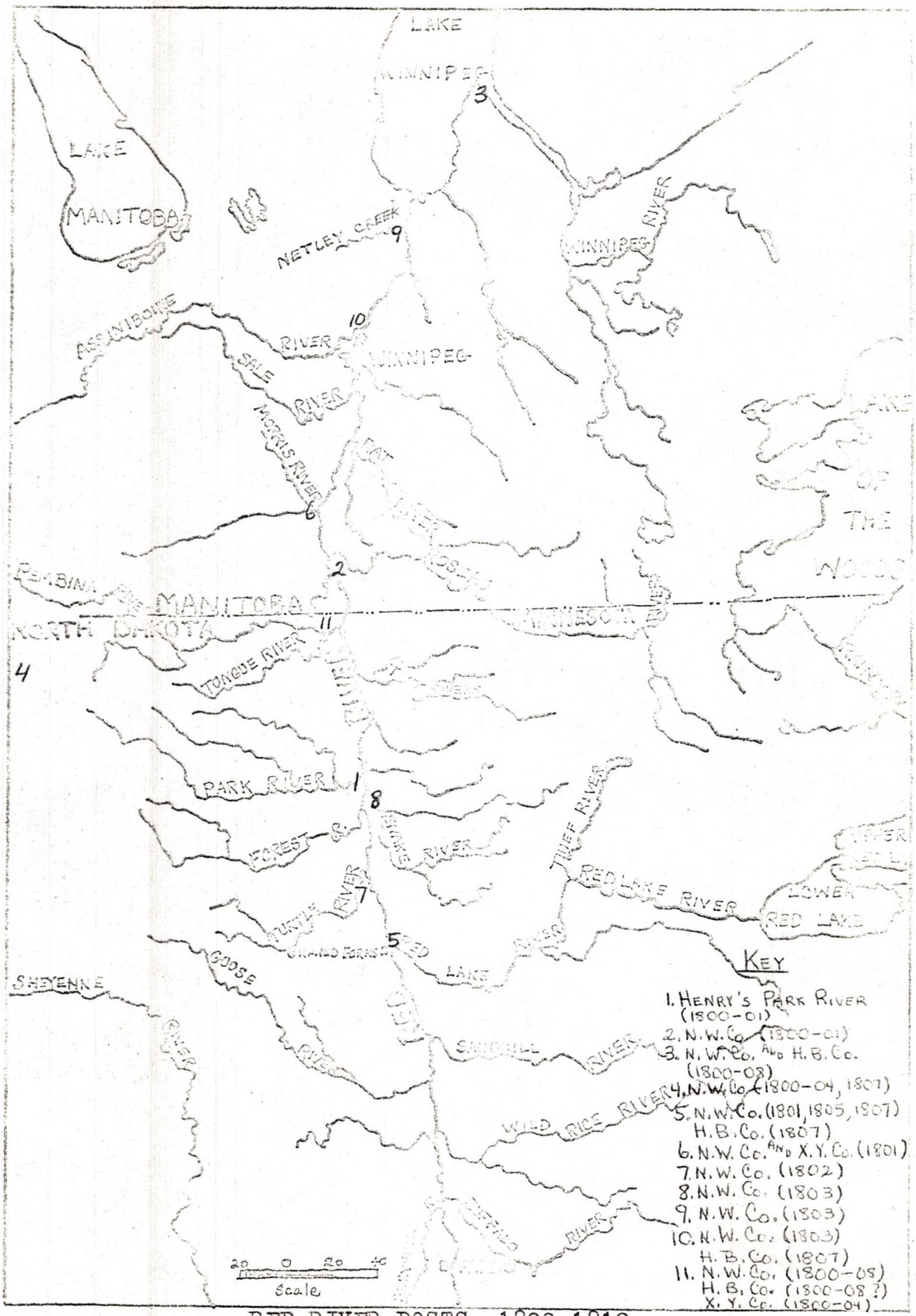
With no boundary existing the British and French traders monopolized the trade. The French traders had pushed into the region before 1763 and were trading in the vicinity before settlers from the United States had moved close to the territory. The United States had practically no interest in the region until 1803 when the Louisiana Purchase was made. Even then it was not clear where the boundaries of the area purchased lay.

As a result, during the years of monopoly the British and French traders had extracted the majority of the fur-bearing animals from the region. By the time the United States traders became interested in the western trade, after the War of 1812, the Red River region was no longer abounding in furs.

APPENDIX A



RED RIVER POSTS, 1763-1799



KEY

1. Henry's Park River (1800-01)
2. N.W. Co. (1800-01)
3. N.W. Co. and H.B. Co. (1800-08)
4. N.W. Co. (1800-04, 1807)
5. N.W. Co. (1801, 1805, 1807) H.B. Co. (1807)
6. N.W. Co. and X.Y. Co. (1801)
7. N.W. Co. (1802)
8. N.W. Co. (1803)
9. N.W. Co. (1803)
10. N.W. Co. (1803) H.B. Co. (1807)
11. N.W. Co. (1800-05) H.B. Co. (1800-08?) X.Y. Co. (1800-04)

RED RIVER POSTS, 1800-1812

APPENDIX B

TRADE GOODS

Below is a partial list of the trade goods that are known to have been bartered with the Indians on the Red River.[1]

Tobacco
Long rifles
Lead balls
Gun powder
Copper kettles
Hunting traps-beaver, bear, raccoon, and others.
Tobacco boxes
Hawk bells
Cast bells
Capes
Handkerchiefs
Lace hats
Velvet hats
Jackets
Shrouds
Blankets
Garters
Knit caps
Needles
Awls
Thread
Scrapers
Flints
Vermillion
Tin kettles
Flour
Sugar
Knives-large and small
Axes
Crooked knives
Rum
High wine (brandy)

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[1] Henry, I, 7, 97, Hickerson, pp. 273, 366.

APPENDIX C

NORTH WEST COMPANY RED RIVER RETURNS, 1800-07[1]

	1800-01	1801-02	1802-03	1803-04	1804-05	1805-06	1806-07
Beaver	1,475	1,369	917	1,416	1,460	1,118	1,065
Otter	96	60	70	74	119	129	88
Mink	97	37	50	52	209	176	54
Muskrat	27	13	127		1,091	118	64
Fisher	178	185	278	130	115	199	169
Marten	62	24	82	239	211	275	90
Raccoon	197	85	102	57	81	138	
Badger	10	4	4		10		
Wolverine	5	4	4	7	7	11	3
Kit Fox	16		24	20	57		
Fox	184	77	162	67	179	427	81
Wolves	194	256	582	281	607	843	377
Lynxes	20	67	47	76	22		
Elk	92	270	45		190	61	32
Moose	21	20	77	39	37	186	99
Black Bear	220	64	97	127	97	75	159
Grizzly Bear	6			1	10	3	1
Brown Bear		11	28	22	30	20	32
Buffalo Robes	57	10	1	18	37	74	
Sacks of Pemmican	77	90	53	71	67	223	70

[1]Henry, I, 184, 198, 221, 245, 259, 281, 422, 440.

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